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Transformation, Transcendence and Temporality in Theatrical Consumption

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Abstract

This paper proposes a framework for analyzing and understanding communal centered consumption based on the concept of 'theatre'. The focus of attention is the Gothic community, a consumer tribe that may be described as extraordinary and spectacular. Goths are also a group that have associations with the 'dark' side and in particular with the vampire. We draw on a longitudinal Grounded Theory study conducted at the bi-annual Whitby Goth festival in the North East of England which involved participation, observation, interviews, and videographic data. We examine the co-constructed experience of the festival and propose an analytical framework based on the fundamental concepts of theatre. We suggest that theatrical co-construction may be understood in terms of three components: theatre as 'transformation', theatre as 'transcendence' and theatre as 'temporality'. This perspective also provides a novel approach for festival event management.

Key words: Theatre; Festival; Grounded Theory; Co-construction, Goth

Transformation, Transcendence and Temporality in Theatrical Consumption

Time and distance seemed endless and my knees trembled and my breath came labored as I toiled up the endless steps to the abbey. I must have gone fast, yet it seemed to me as if my feet were weighted with lead, as though every joint in my body were rusty. When I got almost to the top I could see the seat and the white figure, for I was now close enough to distinguish it even through the spells of shadow. There was undoubtedly some thing, long and black, bending over the half reclining white figure. I called in fright, Lucy, Lucy, and something raised a head, and from where I was I could see a white face and red gleaming eyes..

Nina searches for Lucy at Whitby Abbey (from Bram Stoker's Dracula, 1897/1999)

Sitting in the graveyard at Whitby at the top of the East Cliff looking down onto the sea, it easy to understand why Bram Stoker chose this as his setting for 'Dracula'. Climb the 199 steps leading up from the town and you find yourself in a haunting Victorian graveyard, nestled in the shadow of Whitby's ruined abbey. From here you get the perfect view of the harbor where Dracula arrived, in the middle of a storm, swept in on a ghostly ship (Stoker, 1999). Whitby has a long connection with the vampire, immortalized in Bram Stokers Dracula. It also has a traditional tourist base of family day trippers and holiday makers, but all this changes when the Goths arrive for their bi-annual festival. For two weeks of the year, one in April the other in October, over two thousand Goths descend on this small town in the North East of England. Right from the very start of the festival, Whitby undergoes a transformation.

The Goths arriving, by conventional means of car and train, or making a more theatrical entrance by slowly pulling up in dark, sinister looking hearses, create an instant impact. All of a sudden the atmosphere is transformed. There is an air of excitement and anticipation as the wildly elaborate, the somber, and the darkly garbed participants reach the end of their pilgrimage to this sacred place.

(Researchers memo)

This paper, which uses the Gothic community as its focus of analysis, is located within the tradition of consumer research within marketing which privileges experiences, a holistic view of consumption and the notion of consumer behavior as a journey (see in particular Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989). It is a perspective that challenges traditional methods and disciplines for understanding consumers. These include efforts to understand the market through segmentation and the dominance of cognitive psychology with its emphasis on individual behavior. This alternative lens which has gained increasing recognition within marketing (Shankar *et al* 2006), adopts a social orientation which views consumers as communities or tribes (Cova 1997; Cova and Cova 2002; Gouldng *et al* 2009; 2013), and active co-constructers of marketplace experiences **(**Shankar *et al* 2006**).** Consumer tribes exist when members identify with one another, share experiences and emotions, and engage in collective social action, all of which can be facilitated through a variety of brands, products, experiences and services (Cova and Cova 2002; Goulding *et al* 2013). Contemporary consumer tribes are further defined by their effervescent and transitory nature whereby members may belong to several tribes at the same time (Cova and Pace 2006; Cova *et al*, 2007; Shankar *et al*, 2006). Indeed tribal theory stresses the occurrence of flows between different identities under different circumstances (Bennett 1999). Moreover,

tribes are playful and value is often placed on the possibility of invigorating passion and generating social links through deconstructing and reassembling marketplace resources (Cova *et al* 2007). In line with this playful experimentation, tribes can also be entrepreneurial (Goulding and Saren 2007) where an empowered and emancipated attitude to the market opens up new paths for entrepreneurial ventures (Cova *et al* 2007; Goulding *et al* 2013). To these characteristics we add the propositions that tribal experiences can be both performative and transformative.

In this paper we situate our research in the context of one such experience, 'The Whitby Goth Festival', and one such consumer tribe, the Goths. Goths are a community who engage in spectacular consumption, but who are often associated with the 'dark' side of life and death. We draw on the findings of a longitudinal qualitative study at the Whitby bi-annual Goth festival, a destination chosen by the Goths because of its association with Bram Stoker and the legend of Dracula. Stoker was inspired to write 'Dracula' while staying in Whitby, and the town is immortalized as the site of the vampire's arrival in England and his seduction of 'Lucy' in the grounds of Whitby Abbey. Based on our observations and extensive interview data, we present a framework of co-construction of experience as 'theatre'. Theatre, in the same vein as art, music and movies (Choi, Ko and Megehee 2014) may be said to have a transformative effect on the participant. Theatre is also an experience that has the potential to transform and transcend the mundane and transport the individual or group into the realm of the spectacular. By its very nature theatre is transformative – it transforms space, place, people and time through the suspension of disbelief and engagement in the play. This paper aims to contribute to consumer theory in marketing regarding i) the notion of marketplace consumption as theatre, ii) the process of transformation of consumer identity through tribal event experiences, iii)

how consumers co-create personal and communal narratives through performance, and iv) the performative role of event management in the co-construction of consumer experiences. We first examine the concepts of drama, performance and theatre before presenting the details of the qualitative study which forms the basis of the work. We then discuss the findings through a framework of theatrical consumption before concluding with some thoughts on the implications of utilizing a theatrical framework beyond the festival context.

Drama

The concepts of ‘drama’, ‘theatre’ and ‘performance have a well-established history in the literature that seeks to understand and explain human behavior. Early theorists, such as the literary critic Kenneth Burke (1945, 1969) introduced a dramatistic model of human behavior which posited that symbolic action was the defining activity of human beings. Accordingly any motivated action can be understood in terms of the ‘Pentad’ - consisting of the act, the scene, the agent, the agency, and the purpose; and the ‘Ratio’, which involves the interaction and relationship of any two or more of these five (Clark and Mangham, 2004). Burke’s work had a profound effect on Erving Goffman, a member of the Chicago school of symbolic interactionists. Goffman's work has exerted considerable influence in terms of understanding the construction and expression of the self through social interactions. In particular, his (1959) ‘presentation of self in everyday life’ has resonance with our interpretation in that it offers the suggestive analogy between interactions and drama. He goes so far as to propose that whilst the world is not always a stage, there are few instances when it is not.

The vocabulary used by Goffman (1959) is further in keeping with his dramaturgical principles. For instance, metaphors such as 'performance', 'routines', 'setting', 'props', 'front region', and 'back stage'. The social actor is perceived as part of a team, engaged in a performance with the objective of creating an impression on an audience. In essence performances are imbued with certain characteristics. These include a setting or a stage upon which the performance takes place; stories or plays which are acted out; actors who take on supporting and key roles; an audience; props and costumes; and the creation of a spectacular 'other worldly' environment.

Conceptualizing the Theatre Metaphor

While the concepts of 'performance' (Sundaram and Webster, 2000; Harris, Harris and Baron, 2003), 'drama' (Grove, Fisk and Bitner, 1992; Stuart, and Tax, 2004) 'dramaturgy' (Romm, 1989; Soloman, Surprenant, Czepiel. and Gutman, 1985; Harris, Harris and Baron, 2001) and 'theatre' (Mangold and Babakus, 1991; Grove and Fisk, 1992; Grove, Fisk. and Dorsch, 1998; Williams, and Anderson, 2005) have been employed in many marketing studies, the application of the theatrical metaphor still remains predominantly in the services and retailing literatures, as the above references demonstrate. Additionally, the focus has been mainly on the service provider and the overall encounter, as opposed to consumers and their role in co-constructing the experience (Moisio and Arnould, 2004). Deighton (1992) is largely responsible for introducing the concept of performance into the realm of consumer behavior and in doing so, highlighting its significance as a conceptual tool (see also Firat and Dholokia (1998)). However, with the exception of Moisio and Arnould (2005) who extend the dramaturgical framework, applying it to the realm of shopping

behavior, few empirical consumer studies have explicitly utilized or developed the concept of performance.

That is not to say that performance is absent in consumer studies. On the contrary there are strong undercurrents and theatrical acknowledgements inherent in many studies of, for example, communal activities of leisure based consumption. Its presence is evident and acknowledged in the high risk, adrenaline fuelled white water rafting described by Arnould and Price, (1993) and Arnould, Price and Otnes (1999). In a similar vein Celsi, Rose and Leigh's (1993) study of ski diving has a strong performative character. Other studies that incorporate performance include gay consumers actions and interactions at carnival (Kates 2002, 2003), Star Trek fan communities (Kozinets, 2001; 2007), the re-enactment of the Mountain Men experience described by Belk and Costa (1998), the rituals, rites and performances of the new bikers (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), the rodeo experience (Penaloza, 2001), and the co-created performance of consumers at ESPN Zone Chicago (Kozinets, Sherry, Storm, Duhachek, Nuttavuthisit and Deberry-Spence, 2004). In this paper we utilize the concept of performance, but extend the analogy to encompass the co-constructed nature of 'theatre' which involves both consumers and producers in the creation of the experience.

Methodology

This work is based on a longitudinal, ten year Glaserian grounded theory study which stresses emergence over forcing (Glaser 1972). The context of the research was the bi-annual Gothic festival held in Whitby in the North east of England. This festival has been held there for over twenty years and attracts in excess of 2000 participants of all ages, social backgrounds and gender orientations. Our original

intention was to explore issues surrounding the 'darker' side of consumption such as death, mortality, vampirism and heavy metal music. As such Goths, on face value, appeared to offer an ideal group, largely due to their representation in the media and moral panics evoked through association with ritual killing, the Colombine massacre (Martin, 2002; Picart and Greek, 2003), the dark and often Satanic music of Marilyn Manson and their image as a culture of alienation (Gagnon, 2001; Bettez-Halnon, 2006). In reality, what occurred was that we as researchers, through our processes of data collection involving immersion in the culture, embarked on a journey of transformation. This journey changed our preconceptions, our attitudes and our understanding of the culture. In the spirit of grounded theory, the research became one of immersion, emergence and reflexivity involving multiple visits to the festival and ongoing contact with a number of key informants. One central observation which became a focus of enquiry was the theatrical element of the experience, how it was constructed, enacted and what it meant to participants.

Recruitment of Informants: With regard to the process of data collection, we initially contacted the organizer of the festival and explained our interests and asked for her assistance in recruiting informants. She invited us to design and submit a poster detailing who we were, what the research was about and contact numbers. These posters were then distributed at all the pre-events and were displayed throughout the duration of the festival at all the major venues. She also provided us with passes allowing access to all areas and all events which enabled us to engage in participatory observation. The posters generated considerable attention and we were contacted by several Goths who agreed to be interviewed about their experiences. Two of these became our gate keepers and guides. Both are well established figures at

the festival and had connections at all levels including fellow Goths, Goth retailers and the organizing body. They showed us around the landmarks of Whitby, climbing the 199 steps up to the abbey with us, introduced us to other participants, and initiated us into the rites and rituals of Goth dancing and the various genres of Goth music.

During the course of the event we ate and drank in the restaurants favored by Goths, visited the abbey, shopped in the Goth shops and listened to the music. We mixed with Goths on an informal basis and used the two main pubs, the Elsinore and The Angel. Our data collection consisted primarily of participatory observation of activities including retail settings, band venues and dance nights. Observations were written up in the form of memos and video recordings were made at a variety of events (Penaloza 1998). Data collection and analysis were simultaneous, consisting of an inductive, interactive process of constant comparison between data collection, preliminary analysis, idea generation, further data collection and more focused questioning (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Sampling was based on the principles of theoretical sampling where emerging theory derived from the data dictates contexts and people who may provide the greatest insights (Glaser and Strauss 1967). To this end we sampled broadly talking to a wide range of Goth participants including vampire, cyber, punk and Victorian Goths as well as retailers and festival organizers.

After the first event we kept in touch with our key informants one of whom invited us to his home to see how Goth was very much part of his general lifestyle. In addition, between venues we were contacted via email by a number of people who had seen the poster and were keen to participate. The time gap allowed us to reflect further on the data collected at the site, refine our ideas and construct a more focused interview schedule which we conducted by email with new informants. This was also delivered to the original group who were asked to reflect, adjust anything they felt was

not right and add to their initial narratives. During the six months gap between the October and April festivals we reflected on the data and identified a number of emergent themes. We kept in touch with our key informants and the following year we returned to Whitby for another week and met up once again with a number of our earlier informants with whom we spent the majority of the time, meeting new people, collecting further data and refining our ideas. Over the following eight years we returned to Whitby six more times as ideas were developed, new questions generated from the data and key explanatory concepts solidified. In total we collected over seventy hours of audio-taped interviews with 30 Goths, ten hours of video recordings and copious memos. Importantly we also had a wealth of insights gained from informal conversations with Goths from all walks of life including doctors, nurses, local authority planners and computer programmers. Analysis of the data took the form of transcription of interview data, comparison of informant's narratives, open coding to 'describe' basic story lines, the identification of themes and patterns through axial coding, to ultimately a more abstract conceptualization of the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glasder 1972). As to be expected with a longitudinal in-depth study of, in this case, a highly complex group, many different ideas and theories are generated which deal with varying aspects of behavior – far too many to discuss in a single paper. Through theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to answer emerging questions we investigated such issues as gender at the festival, entrepreneurship, and the role of the anti-hero. What follows is our analysis of the framing of the experience which was a key theme of the data. This framing can be explained in terms of 'theatre' and the key components associated with dramatic consumption. Just as there are many types of performance, so too, there are many types of 'theatre'. Theatre can be defined by physical space and design. It can also be defined by history (i.e., Greek,

Shakespearian, Gothic) and by an underpinning philosophy regarding representation (i.e., Brechtian, Theatre of the Absurd, Artaudian). In our analysis we take some inspiration from Artaudian (Antonin Artaud) with his emphasis on theatre as a supplement to life. In this sense theatre acts as a reflection of life, and of real incidents, and is a doubling of cultural ritual. It is a celebration of bodily aesthetics whereby the 'bodily' applies to both means of production and conditions of reception (Lash, 1990). In this sense, the Goth festival is a slice of 'real' theatrical life. It occurs within a physical space and involves ritualized cultural enactments. It is also temporally designated and defined by the bodily aesthetics of the actors. In the following section we investigate these issues in greater depth.

Theatre as transformation

Stages and Settings: For the two weeks of the year when the Goth festival takes place the normally tranquil resort of Whitby in the North East of England is taken over and resignified. It becomes a backdrop or stage for the participants to perform upon. Pubs are transformed from ordinary eating and drinking establishments into dark, cavernous spaces, their walls adorned with bats, cut out vampires, cobwebs and monsters. There is a high degree of parody involved, but it adds to the atmosphere. The abbey that sits on top of the cliff, usually frequented by day trippers and holiday makers becomes a backdrop for parasol touting, silk and lace wearing female Goths, accompanied by elegantly suited male Goths. The Vampires prefer to visit at night, well after dark when the clubs are empty, to sit drinking red wine among the gravestones. Their favorite time to congregate is Halloween, which usually

coincides with one of the two festivals. Goth is not a homogenous culture and the diversity of costumes and looks embraced by the different factions creates a sense of high theatre. For example, vamp Goths can be seen patrolling the streets, the men in top hats and tails reminiscent of Gary Oldman's Dracula, the women in tight bodices, bustled dresses, feather-trimmed hats, and black lace parasols. The 'Romantics' nostalgically clad in Byronesque, flowing velvet coats and lace-ruffled shirts contrast with the pale faces, jet-crimped hair and black street garb of the Punk Goths. Cyber Goths, on the other hand, introduce some color in the form of red and black striped leggings. This in itself does not reflect the eclecticism of Goth. Like Belk's (1994) description of Halloween revelers, and Kozinets (2002) Burning Man participants who invert the normal, add to this pirates, nuns, devils, nineteen twenties flappers, men dressed as women, women dressed as men, and some so totally androgynous as to be indistinguishable and the picture becomes more representative of the reality of the Gothic drama which is enacted at Whitby.

If we are to talk about 'theatrical' consumption, then the first thing to recognize is that performances usually take place upon a stage or within a particular setting conducive to the drama that is being enacted. Place is a complex issue (Arefi, 1999) and at Whitby the interpretation and use of place is based on emotional attachments (Urry, 1990) and perceptions of authenticity (MacCannell, 1992). For Goths, Whitby holds both emotional attachments due to its connection with the Dracula myth, and a perceived authenticity, resulting from the Abbey, which is a tangible reminder of the vampire's arrival in Britain. The Goth festival takes place within particular spatially defined environments whereby places such as graveyards are turned into spaces for identity construction and expression. This involves transformation of place and space for the duration of the event. During the festival

spatial meanings are transformed (Auge, 1995) as there is a shift from one code of meeting into another (Braidotti, 2006). The venues occur in spontaneous and also 'produced' spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) but they become sites where human experience and self are realized through active spatial practices (Thrift, 1996).

Actors, Roles and Performing Identity: Central to any theatrical production are the actors themselves, their roles and their status in the drama. The analogy of the individual as 'actor' has an established place in the literature. Goffman's (1959) 'self performance' is one by which meaning is formed in and on a mirror stage. The mirror metaphor represents the process of signification in which the self is constructed by the concealment and disclosure of signs. In other words it is a social act of image formation. Central to this is the idea of the self as a simulation. Here make believe, authenticity and simulation serve as vehicles of socio-cultural transformation as individuals adopt and shed characters across the various roles and situations they find themselves in. At the festival, these roles become exaggerated and enacted to the full. For the duration of the event there are numerous multiple performances, often running in parallel. One can watch Goth Morris dancers performing in the square, vampire Goths playing out the myth in the abbey graveyard and Goth Monks roaming the streets in cowls and robes. However, the main events offer the greatest opportunity to show off and attract attention. At the Spa Pavillion where the big name Goth bands play, at least 2,000 Goths parade, perform and compete for attention as they adopt their desired persona and become that fantasy character. For most, this dressing up is about 'reaffirming' a sense of self and performing identity in the company of other like minded individuals. As Laura explains:

> Laura: I think Goth is one of two things for most people. It is either a reaffirmation of the self, or an opportunity to become a person you aren't normally. To be out in a group of Goths is very exciting and makes you feel less of an "outsider". As such you tend to really go for the dressing-up and costume when you're in that situation because you have more confidence in your identity. When 9-5 you're the geeky IT boy, or a sales assistant by day, at night or at the weekend you can become another person, or even your real self.

Performing identity on the Goth scene is also about performing difference and standing out from the 'non' creative mainstream who, on the whole, have little tolerance in the face of 'otherness'. The idea of tolerance, 'difference' and social identity were a key defining feature of being a Goth for most of our informants, many of whom had experienced prejudice and, on occasion even violence for 'daring to be different'. Goth identity is also closely linked to a particular visual aesthetic, which because of its extreme theatricality, invites attention, wanted or not.

Stars, Supporting Cast and Audience: Goth is a highly visual culture and although our participants described it as a 'family' with all new members welcome, the reality is that there is a pecking order grounded in a hierarchy. These hierarchical distinctions are based on commitment (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and the attainment of a high degree of subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995). This of course varies depending on the centrality of Goth to the individuals' identity. These can distinguish who are the 'stars', who are the 'support cast' and who are the audience, as Clinton observes:

> It's a bit like the "Animal Farm" motto really. There is equality, yet there is a hierarchy too. I would say that anyone could be a Goth if they wanted to and there is not much within the culture to prevent a person of any colour or creed from doing so. Yet there is a hierarchy and this is very much to do with personal participation. You'll find that the Goths "higher up" are the ones who make the most effort with the scene and with their image. For example, I like the fangs and the whole vampire look, but I didn't just want a pair that stuck over my teeth. I searched the yellow pages until I found a dental technician who would make them so they sat on a plate which was hidden. They took months to make and cost around £350, which was a hell of a lot cheaper than if a dentist had made them.

For some, Goth is their main role and they commit and dedicate themselves to it; perfecting their craft and honing their performance. Others are content to play lesser parts, or simply spectate.

Audience: One further feature of theatre is audience. If Goths are viewed as actors engaged in a performance then they normally require an audience to play to. The audience may take many forms, as in the Goth community itself. Indeed there is no denying that participants come to see and be seen. Goths also attract external audiences. There are the residents of Whitby who are now used to the spectacle but still come out to observe; and then there are the Goth watchers, a new breed of day tourist who come to Whitby specifically to see the Goths, mingle with them, photograph them and have their photographs taken with them. However, these performances are also based on a tacit understanding of the theatrical context. To walk

in on a scene unexpectedly, or ignorant of the fact that a drama is taking place can, to put it mildly, result in a shock to the system, as we noted in an amusing encounter on a trip to the abbey graveyard. Here we came across a bright orange tent out of which emerged two elderly men looking visibly shaken. They explained to us that they had traveled down from Newcastle for a fishing trip and had pitched their tent in the graveyard, expecting it to be the quietest spot in Whitby. Around 2.00am, they were awakened by noises outside of the tent. When they looked out they were confronted with a scene of vampires sitting amidst the graves, holding candles, fangs glinting in the light, drinking red wine! Unfortunately, they had never heard of the Goth festival!

Transformation Through Props: Integral aspects of theatre are the props and costumes that transform the ordinary into the extraordinary or the spectacular. The drama continues throughout the duration of the festival at both the metaphysical level and the physical. For example, the drinking of red wine is symbolic of turning wine into blood; a mirroring of the act of transubstantiation in many Christian faiths. At the physical level, a whole retail industry descends for the two separate weeks offering a staggering range of merchandise. These include corsets of varying shapes, size and style, fangs, whether custom made or bought ‘off the shelf’, masks, wigs, leather and PVC, light sticks, fetish gear, period costumes and even coffins which can be ordered and delivered. Some drive the ultimate status symbol, the hearse, whilst others adorn their motorbikes with Goth motifs and slogans. Authenticity, is held to be highly important. Clinton, for example when discussing his outfit described how, he had bought his coat and shirt in Whitby. “*You have to go to Whitby if you want the real thing*.” With Goth there is a focus on the body as central to the performances. As such

physical appearances are played with and altered to various extremes by using props to turn the normal into the spectacular, as described by Laura:

> Goths use lots of sensuous material like velvet and lace, PVC and leather for clothing – I suppose it's quite decadent and redolent of an image. The velvet and lace is more a Romantic image, whereas the PVC and leather are taken from the S&M fetish scenes, so props are all part of portraying your image. The Victorian crowd accessorise with top hats, black lace parasols and canes, whereas the cyber crowd sometimes wander about with what look to be paint-ball, or radar guns. Hair also defines the kind of impression you're going for, though there are crossovers. Generally you have the long black flowing hair, which is often accentuated with hair extensions, be they permanent or removable. You'd see this kind of look with the Romantic/Victorian crowd. The dreaded look is much more symbolic of the cyber crowd, with wool braids and dreads. More recently, the cyber crowd have been seen a lot with plastic and foam tubing as extensions. The cyber element of Goth is quite exciting in that people are always trying out new materials in different ways to keep the futuristic look fresh.

There are however, variations in the lengths that individuals will go to in order to complete their transformations. On one level, there is the 'stage make-up'; fangs, cats eye contact lenses, white powdered faces, black or ruby lips, and false nails. There are also the elaborate costumes; capes, top hats, period dresses, jet jewelry, leather and PVC. These enable the performance and act to extend the self (Belk, 1988) as noted by Clinton who when talking about putting together his 'look' needed his

fangs in order for him '*to feel complete*'. These props imbue the individual with a sense of 'theatre' as aptly described by Clinton,

> When I'm dressed in full costume, I feel more theatrical, my arms make more expressive and exaggerated gesture and I tip my hat to fellow vampire Goths when I meet them.

Despite Goffman's (1974) preoccupation with the social construction and recreation of reality, an implication of the theatrical analogy of interaction is that people do not have any central reality, or 'self' beyond the performances which they put on for others (Goffman 1961). By contrast, our Goths demonstrated a clear distinction between the world of the everyday and the world of dress up and make believe. They recognized that what they were engaging in were theatrical performances, which would come to an end with the close of the festival when the 'curtain falls'.

Theatre as Transcendence

Theatrical Stories: Enacting the Myth: Although there are some exceptions, for example with total improvisation, most performances revolve around a story, a play or a particular narrative. These stories demand the suspension of disbelief on the part of both performer and spectator as the play goes beyond the mere realm of fun and enjoyment. These stories enable the enactment of extraordinary experiences and allows participants to "*Transcend rational logic that dominates everyday life and, the ordinary experience of commercial leisure services consumption*" (Arnould, Price and Otnes, 1999, p60). The Goth festival certainly qualifies in this respect, particularly

with regard to the fantastical and the mystical that support and maintain the experience. The Gothic community is founded upon a particular myth; that of the vampire, a legendary creature that has a history going back to the Ancient Egyptians, but who is possibly most iconicized and romanticized in Bram Stoker's book, Dracula. Myths have their place in many cultures. They provide a sense of history, context and continuity. They can also become the encoded embodiment of values which are enacted within the group. Inherently, myths incorporate a sense of mystery which helps to sustain their existence (Roth, 1995) and the vampire myth is shrouded in mystery, which for many Goths has been the subject of a life time fascination and is the main attraction of the scene:

> *Becky:* It was definitely related to my morbid interest in horror and vampires when I was younger. I think I was under the initial impression that these people were as morbid as I and that this would definitely be somewhere I could fit in. Possibly I was under the romantic delusion that vampires just might exist. Floating around in black capes, and Victorian dresses appealed to me too and I would always have a good stare at any Goths I saw, wondering where they got their clothes.

While the vampire myth is central to many of the re-enactments, Goths do not actually believe they are vampires. The parody and pastiche evident in the pubs and the main events themselves indicate that vampiric role play has a fun element to it which is not devoid of humor.

Theatre as Transcending Boundaries: Goth is an illustration of how, through theatrical performances, boundaries may be transgressed, broken down, and resignified. Arnould et al (1999, p39) assert that "people have to be in the right state

of mind to experience transcendence", and the transformative process of getting into role and changing character enforces a change in mindset. Dramas require a range of characters to take on the various roles needed to make the scene believable. At Whitby we encountered people of all age groups. At the Spa, we met Freaky, a 40 year old punk/metal Goth who was there with his wife and their six month old baby, known as 'baby freak'. At the other extreme there were participants (although by no means the majority) in their 70s and 80s, dressed in the costumes of Victorian ladies and Victorian undertakers.

In addition to age, class did not feature as any kind of definer of membership. We spoke to people from across the class spectrum. Many are drawn from the medical profession, and as such deal with death and mortality on a daily basis. These doctors and nurses found the kind of role play at Whitby a way of facing it personally, collectively, and frequently, with humor.

Goths attract people from all walks of life. For the duration of the festival they leave behind their normal values, beliefs and customs to engage in a common performance that involves the suspension of the norm. This even extends to religion. We spoke to Goths who described themselves as 'Wiccans', Pagans', 'Christians', 'Jews', 'atheists' and 'agnostics'. Christine, who is a Wiccan, spoke of her partner, describing him as a Satanist, but qualifying the label by arguing that, essentially, Satanism had 'a lot of bad press' and it was really a religion that was dedicated to nature. However, Goths do not segregate themselves along religious lines. On Halloween, Wiccans, Christians and atheists mingle at the graveyard in ritualized play to pay homage to the dead. In a Radio 4 interview, the vicar of Whitby described the shock he received the first time he went into the graveyard on Halloween, to witness it

full of ‘vampires’. But, as he explained, his service the next day was attended by many of the same graveyard revelers.

Theatre as Temporality

Festival Time: Belk *et al* (1989) argue the case that the profound changes in contemporary life, of which consumption has become a driving force, have seen a ‘sacarlization’ of the secular (p8) whereby people look elsewhere for experiences that transcend everyday life. The utopian space that is the Whitby festival offers one such transcending experience. But it is a temporarily defined experience that is based on space, collectivity, common identification and ritualized action (dancing, drinking, pilgrimage and so on). Identities are enacted and lived out at this unique site during ‘festival’ time. In other words they are temporally and spatially specific to that particular community and involve a process of transformation for the duration of the festival. What occurs is a temporary destruction of existing social structures that is marked by reversals of ordinary behavior as members engage in a liminal experience, defined by Turner (1995, p. 156) as a “time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action. Liminal moments are moments when individuals find themselves divorced from their everyday social structures”. Like Bakhtin’s (1984) carnival, the sense of theatre created by the Goths is not merely a spectacle seen by the people, rather they live in it and everyone participates because its very idea embraces everyone. The concept of carnival and the carnivalesque is evident in the collective gatherings of Goths throughout their time in Whitby. If one observes, for example, the dress and performances at the Spa (the main social venue), there are individuals

dressed as pirates, vampires, figures from history, Nazis with braided dreadlocks, transvestites, cyber-Goths, skeletons and fetishists. All combine to create a sense of high theatre, or as Clinton notes, it is all a '*form of fancy dress'*. Deeply rooted in its associations with vampirism, the Gothic subculture creates a symbolic space, or a liminality, where class, age and ethnic boundaries can blur. In effect, the Gothic micro-culture itself, in its embracing of difference, provides a temporally and spatially situated carnival space for those who 'dare to be different'. This temporary destruction of existing social structures is also marked by reversals of ordinary behavior. So the bank clerk, the bookseller, the call center worker or the doctor, can leave behind their 'enforced' identities and adopt mythical, cyber, Victorian, or androgynous personas through temporarily and spatially controlled acts of mental and physical transformation.

Festival time is nostalgic time: Festival time is also nostalgic time. During the festival there is a strange juxtaposition between the old and the new. The traffic still flows and all the signs of contemporary living are visibly evident. But, they are confused and blurred in the face of the participants and the trappings that exist as a temporary stage. A 19th Century sailing boat, masts raised, lies anchored in the harbor. The mix of Victorian, Georgian and ancient architecture to be found in the houses and Abbey, along with the narrow winding cobbled streets that lead down to the town, hark back to a bygone age. Add to this Goths in Victorian and Edwardian dress and there is a sense that time is suspended in a sort of no-mans land; somewhere between the past and the present. If anything Whitby resembles a film set, with its mixture of actors, support cast and backstage workers and observers. Therefore, the

festival is not merely a liminal experience in terms of withdrawal from the norm, it is liminal time.

Festival Bodies: One thing that is central to the act of transformation is the place of the embodied self. Bodies exist in space and time and whilst identity may be considered a flexible and fluid concept, the body is the reified manifestation of identity. It is also used as a communicative device to signal shared experience and affiliation. During festival time, the bodily states of the actors are themselves transformed as they engage in the temporary micro-world of theatre and ritual. In essence ritual passage is a process of symbolic and dramatic action which focuses upon the body allowing participants to find and reinstate themselves in space (Werbner, 1989). This enables transformation which in turn provides a mechanism for the recreation of society(ies), in which members share objects and experiences (Etzioni, 2000).

Back stage/front stage preparations: Despite the theatricality of the festival, and the fact that it is played out at certain points during the year, we have to acknowledge that in the intervening months preparations are actively underway for the next event. Bands have to be booked, tickets ordered, accommodation secured and time off from work organized. As soon as one festival ends, rehearsals for the next begin on the part of the producers and the consumers. Many spoke of how they would become really excited thinking about 'the next time'. Friends made at Whitby, but separated through geographical distance would email and phone each other, to plan what they would be wearing, what they intended to buy, ensure they co-ordinated their

tickets and so on. There was also a sense of loss and isolation from being away from the community. As Marty describes:

> Alas, outside of the Whitby festival, my involvement with Goth is very much an individual experience, and pretty much always has been. I live in quite an isolated area so Goths are not normally seen about or tolerated when they are. Nor are there any decent clubs nearby, so most socialising involves trips to London, which is not something you want to do by yourself. I chat to people online but very often they are too far away to meet up. In some respects being the only Goth at work is fun because it becomes one of your defining features, and as no one ever seems to remember my name, having such an identity helps in that respect. However, it is a lonely business and I have to try very hard to keep up with new music and fashions –something I believe it would be easier if I was part of a permanent Goth social group. On the other hand I have become more eclectic in my tastes because I have no constant Goth influence.

Marty's feelings when he is removed from the Whitby Goth scene illustrate how his experience of his time at the festival afterwards leaves a 'trace' with him, if only by its absence. This is similar to Axelrod's (1984) '*shadow of the future'* a past-present-future interaction of events and experiences as 'relational time', where the past and future condition the relationship (Halinen 1988, Hedaa and Törnroos, 2002, Medlin, 2004). Similarly, although the Goths only come to Whitby for the two weeks of festival, a trace of their presence remains with the *place* all year. This takes an economic form in the preparations of hoteliers and shopkeepers for their next visit. Indeed, the Mayor of Whitby told the local paper in their special 10th festival

anniversary edition how much the town valued and welcomed the Goths. There is also however a trace left in the town's culture; the residents are more aware of their mythical history through the Dracula story and, even in their absence, conscious of Goth music, literature, fashion and style.

Conclusion

We have outlined a framework based on the notion of 'theatre' and the concepts of transformation, transcendence and temporality. We argue that the theatrical metaphor goes beyond performance and could be useful in understanding the eclectic, identity shifting behaviors of neo-tribal communities, whether religious, sporting, music or otherworldly experiences. In our opening section we referred to a number of studies that were performative in nature. We suggest that the concepts we have outlined may be just as applicable to the contexts and situations presented by, for example, Belk and Costa's (1998) mountain men 'rendezvous', or Kozinets (2002) 'Burning Man' festival, or Star Trek fans (Kozinets, 2001). Equally, they could be used as a framework for analyzing the gay festival environment described by (Kates, 2002, 2003). In effect, 'theatre' and its associated properties offers an alternative lens for understanding social consumer behavior.

This study of participants' experiences of the Whitby festival as theatre contributes to our understanding of theories of consumer behaviour in three important respects. First, our analysis of marketplace consumption as theatre explains how the Goth culture enables participants to construct and transform their identity . Second, our framework offers a tool of analysis for a core aspect of consumer culture theory which studies "the co-constitutive, co-productive ways in which consumers, working

with market generated materials, forge a coherent, if diversified and often fragmented sense of self“ (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p880). If consumers are viewed as identity seekers and makers, and the marketplace is the primary source of ‘mythic and symbolic resources’ through which people construct “narratives of identity” (Holt 2002), then dramatalurgical and theatrical techniques can help analyze this process. Third, our detailed analysis of participants’’ experiences of the Goth festival provides a set of examples which reveal in detail how consumers co-create their own personal and communal narratives through theatrical consumption.

The Goths further illustrate the point that not all subcultural activity takes place as an act of resistance against hegemonic domination, nor are their members engaged in active resistance against the market. On the contrary, Goths emphatically embrace the market. For them, the increase in choice, in availability and access to products and services serves as a form of emancipation; an emancipation from ‘normality’ through escape and play, which is heavily embedded in objects of consumption. As Belk (2000) astutely observes, “we need play because it is a joyful self transcending part of life which fulfils a higher order need in affluent society” (p118).

In this sense the Goths can tell us much about identity management, performance and the role of play. However, the findings from this study also have implications for event management. At Whitby we observed a festival situation that was based on mutual co-operation between local government (in respect of permissions etc), the organizers and the consumers. The end result was an enjoyable experience, high levels of involvement based on co-creation, and an economic benefit to the town from the income generated over the course of the week. The Goths managed to strike a fine balance that is seldom achieved in such situations. Normally,

festivals lead to antagonism and resentment on the part of local residents and officials. For example, Kozinets notes how the Burning Man festival had to be moved due to opposition. Similarly early unregulated Raves became the object of persecution and ultimately legislation banning them (Goulding *et al,* 2009). The Goth festival illustrates the advantages to be gained through pursuing a path based on mutual benefits, mutual planning, involvement, and co-creation of the experience on the part of organizers, consumers and locals. Moreover, co-creation in the festival sense introduces the importance of such variables as front and back stage preparations, rehearsals and, importantly 'trace'. Given the global potential to develop such festivals based on music, sports, literature, hobbies, health, fashion, games and other consumer interests, these aspects of festival event management could have potentially significant business applications (Newbold, Maughan, Jordan and Bianchini, 2015).

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